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ABSTRACT

Post-secondary occupational education was created to meet the developing needs for a new class of worker--the technician, the technologist, the semi-professional working as an assistant to professionals. This publication deals with the importance of post-secondary programs in meeting the manpower demands created by technological advancement. Among the topics discussed are: (1) the need for post-secondary institutions to meet the needs of the people and communities who will use the institutions and to keep pace with rapid changes taking place in regard to the needs and opportunities associated with occupational preparation, (2) the role of post-secondary education in providing the opportunity to continue training or upgrade skills, (3) aspects to consider in developing and implementing effective post-secondary occupational programs, and (4) the need for a more positive, aggressive, and dynamic attitude and approach to post-secondary occupational education. (SB)

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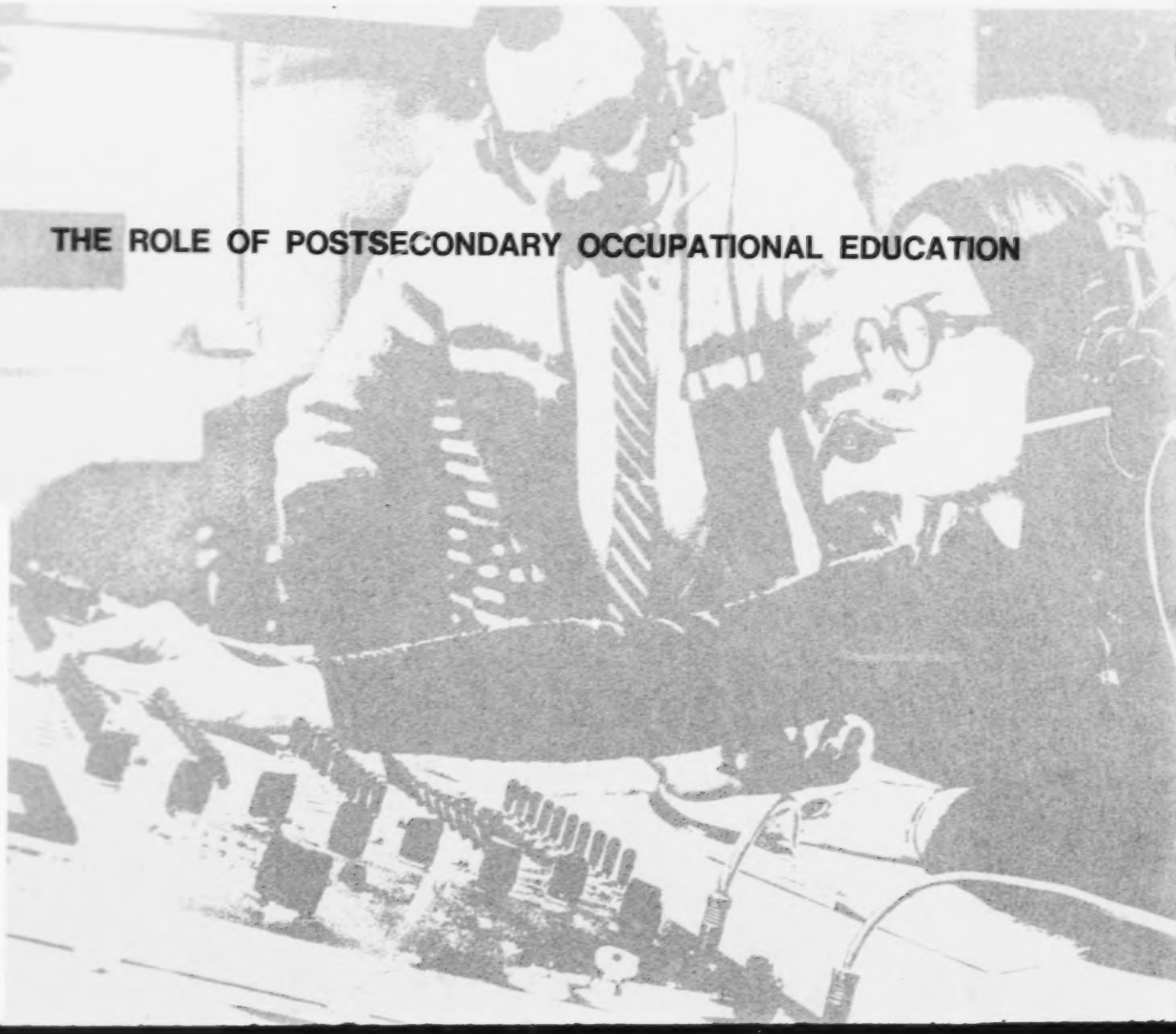
THE ROLE OF POSTSECONDARY OCCUPATIONAL EDUCATION



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THE ROLE OF POSTSECONDARY OCCUPATIONAL EDUCATION

Foreword

Vocational and technical education is a vital part of the total education program for all people and, therefore, must be made available in all types of institutions that offer educational opportunity. Because of technological developments and societal changes, the role and involvement of postsecondary institutions in vocational education are expanding at an unprecedented rate. Realizing this and seeking ways to assist in improving the programs in all types of institutions, the American Vocational Association and the American Association of Junior Colleges have undertaken the publication of this bulletin. This joint project originated as a result of the awareness of leadership responsibility for all vocational-technical education and the desire to assist postsecondary institutions in any way possible to improve the programs of vocational-technical education.

The Planning Committee for the publication was comprised of: B. E. Childers, Georgia; Dean Griffin, AVA Staff; Gerald James, North Carolina; Earl H. Knebel, Texas; Wayne Miller, Oklahoma; Albert Riendeau, U.S. Office of Education; Kenneth Skaggs, AAJC Staff; and, Edwin Taibl, Wisconsin.

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Photos courtesy of Washington Technical Institute, Washington, D.C., Johnson County Community College, Overland Park, Kansas and Northern Virginia Community College, Annandale, Virginia.

Introduction

Education today, like society at large, is at the crossroads of change. Man's modern age has not only flung him into universal space, but has also created a new world for him here on the earth—a new society demanding new jobs, new occupations, new careers. People are doing things today that only a short time ago were undreamed-of, or are doing things in a different way with vastly improved skills and techniques. The traditional "man with the hoe" has given way to a new kind of worker, who not only develops highly perfected skills and abilities, but who also learns the "why" of what he does.

The postsecondary non-baccalaureate educational institution has been defined as one of the appropriate environments in which to prepare this new class of worker—the technician, the technologist, the semiprofessional working as an assistant to professionals. Included in this category of institutions are community junior colleges, technical institutes, and post-high school vocational schools. Within the last decade, the occupational education programs in these institutions have experienced a significant increase in number and in enrollment.

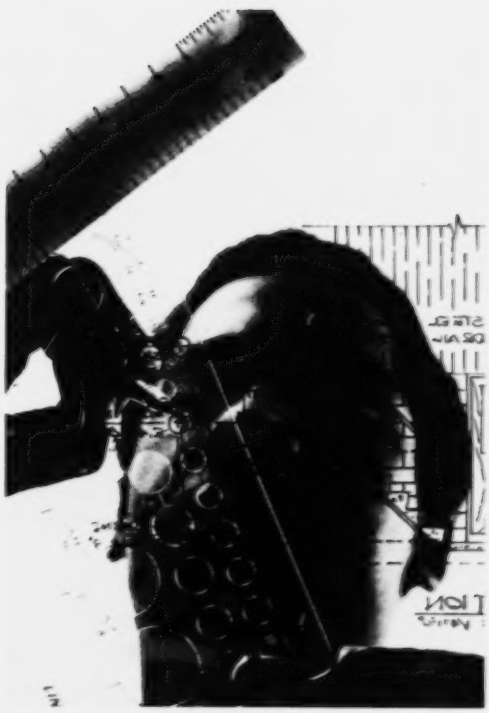
Evidence of their rapid growth is found in a number of reports. The Southern Regional Education Board recently stated that students enrolled in occupational education in those states served by the board more than doubled in number in recent years, with postsecondary occupational program enrollments rising from 118,257 to 280,914—an increase of 138 percent—from 1967 to 1970. A recent survey made by Western Illinois University for the American Association of Junior Colleges revealed that there are more than 20,000 occupational education programs in community junior colleges alone. This represents a nationwide enrollment of close to a million.

The following presentation, while recognizing the value of all occupational education opportunities in all educational institutions, will deal especially with the importance of programs at the postsecondary level; for the rising demands of technology necessitate the preparation of workers more sophisticated and skilled than society has needed before.

I
Needs of Individual and Community in Today's Technology

In the early days of the Industrial Revolution, when technology was largely mechanical and manipulative, procedures formed the basis of training, men were taught by *doing;* they learned on the job in an environment of productivity. But a more sophisticated technology and more complex machinery have made preparation, education, and training for work much more demanding; man has had to emerge as a *thinking* manipulator of his environment. The concept of "learning by doing" on the job has become only one aspect of the whole preparatory and educational process. Not only has the educational institution become a more appropriate learning environment for the career-minded person, but it has had to provide him with education on conceptual levels not formerly so vital to his development.

The relationship of the individual's education to existing needs has also taken on in-



creased significance: his own needs, the needs of his society, and those of his more specific community—a community that may be geographical in nature, but could equally well be a community of interests, of aspirations, of living envi:onments, or of social strata. The needs of the *producers* of society —industry, commerce, the professions, the agricultural and service producers—have also taken on prime importance, and now exert a growing influence upon the kind and the extent of occupational education sought by the individual.

A prominent characteristic of today's technology, and so also of the preparation required by its workers, must include the concept of continual change. There is hardly a person beginning a career today who can afford the confidence that his or her present skills or training will be adequate to maintain a career for a lifetime.

Thus, the task with which postsecondary educational institutions are faced now appears threefold: first, to help prepare workers who will be aware of and active in the process of shaping their environment; second, to understand and to meet the particular needs of the people and communities who will use the institutions; and, third, to keep pace with the rapid changes taking place in regard to the needs and opportunities associated with occupational preparation.

II
The Unique Role of Postsecondary Occupational Education

Occupational education opportunities have for some time been available in secondary schools, in postsecondary institutions, and in private education agencies. Of these, the postsecondary institution—community junior college, vocational education center, technical institute, or other—has been seen to have certain unique characteristics and to present unique benefits in fulfilling the threefold task outlined previously.

Efforts have been made, not always with success, to define postsecondary occupational education. Norman Harris, of the University of Michigan, states:

> Occupational education refers to any and all education and training offered by "educational institutions" aimed at preparation for employment, as distinguished from curriculums in the liberal arts, the fine arts, and the humanities. The term *occupational education* covers professional, semiprofessional, technical, and skilled-level curriculums for all fields (e.g. agriculture, business, industry, health, home economics, public service) of employment. Some of the programs produce workers who are nearly professional in status and may be termed semiprofessional. Semiprofessional workers usually work in close cooperation with and perhaps under the direct supervision of a professional person in such fields as engineering, medicine and health, architecture, data processing, and nursing.[1]

Attempts have been made to deprecate the importance of the occupational program by calling it "training" rather than education. In reality, training and the sharpening of skills are but a part—albeit an important part—of the total program. There are those who have said it is not a part of education at all; the absurdity of such a statement is its own comment.

Still greater difficulty seems to attend any attempts to define the term "postsecondary." Some have used it as though it were synonymous with the collegiate level. This erroneously implies different strata of courses, each

[1] Norman C. Harris, *Technical Education in the Junior College/New Programs for New Jobs* (Washington, D.C.: American Association of Junior Colleges, 1964), p. 21.

representing a more sophisticated, more difficult, more academically involved curriculum, and thus wrongly suggests that only students of specified qualification and preparation may enter the higher strata of curriculums. If education is to survive and serve the new age, the new society, the new technologies, and the new breed of man, then old rigidities must be abolished, and the focus in education must turn from the program to the student. Postsecondary education, therefore, ought to be regarded as an *age* level, not a *program* level; it is best directed toward clientele in the community that it serves, rather than to a chosen educational level. In this way, postsecondary, adult, and continuing education are responsible for shaping their offerings to serve individuals who cannot be served in any other way.

Who is the person most in need of, and most likely to benefit from, a postsecondary occupational education program? What are the unique characteristics of his which must dictate the policy, program and goals of the institution?

First of all, he is an adult, with a maturity and a certain fund of experience that perhaps fit him to learn more highly specialized skills than would be available in a secondary school. He already may be involved full time in the world of work—a situation which on the one hand will help him to profit more rapidly and directly from school instruction than a younger student would, but which on the other hand will limit the time he has available for such instruction.

He may be a previous dropout, and therefore deficient in many of the skills normally learned in high school; yet he may feel reluctant to re-enter a school system structured chiefly around people younger than himself.

Or, he may have completed a high school program and possess entry-level job skills; he now may wish to advance more fully toward the limit of his capability and to upgrade or revise his skills in order to compete in the changing labor market of the 1970s.

Whatever his particular characteristics, it has been found that, almost in direct proportion to the profundity of his need, he is reluctant or unable to take the initiative in approaching the educational system for the

answers to his needs. Indeed, it is likely that he is not even clearly aware of what those needs are.

The educational institution that serves this individual must be like him, unique—unique in its philosophy and approach, unique in its personnel, and unique in the way it makes use of its assets to attain its goals. Some concrete implications of these features will be dealt with in Section III, which is titled *Program Development*. They might be summarized by the following two points:

First, any occupational institution must, in order to fulfill the needs of the individual, advance the technical preparation of that individual for employment and for a role in society. The unique role of the postsecondary institution is that of bringing about a continuation, and perhaps completion, of the training process that began in the early school years and continued through high school. The postsecondary institution is in a position to offer the capstone to the individual's training, and to place him in the job market fully qualified for high-level performance in the job he has chosen.

A *second* aspect peculiar to the offering of a postsecondary institution is that it provides anyone not currently in school with a place to go to for preparatory training, upgrading, personal improvement or satisfaction courses. The importance of this characteristic should be underscored, in view of the fact that the out-of-school adult often does not know how to seek out the training or retraining that he needs, or, having once found it, may be discouraged by prohibitive requirements or overcomplicated entrance procedures. Every effort should be made to see that the postsecondary occupational program is easily accessible to people; indeed, the institution, through its personnel and its public relations organs, has a certain responsibility for initiative and aggressiveness in approaching the people it proposes to serve.

Postsecondary occupational education's particular contribution to society as a whole is indicated in the following expression of its goals:

1. To offer appropriate educational opportunity to all people
2. To serve specific needs of individuals

3. To serve societal needs, not narrowly but broadly defined

4. To serve the needs for effective, productive personnel in industry, business, the professions, services

5. To raise the aspiration levels for all who would seek education

6. To make the opportunities in occupational education programs the great liberating force of society

7. To prepare to train hundreds of thousands of young people, and older ones, too, in occupational areas, while at the same time providing an understanding of historical perspectives and insights into the elements of logic.[2]

[2] American Association of Junior Colleges, *Occupations and Education in the 70's: Promises and Challenges* (Washington, D.C.: American Association of Junior Colleges, 1970).

III
Program Development

Certain factors are inseparable from the effectiveness or failure of any postsecondary occupational education program, and must be carefully thought out and clearly defined in the planning stages of all programs.

Community needs: In consideration of this highly important factor, which deserves to receive detailed attention from educators, it should be clearly understood that in relation to occupational program development, the "community" is actually a composite of needs rather than a physically defined entity. Thus, the program must serve the community in its educational, industrial, business and professional aspects, and will find its major justification and support according to how well it meets the needs of each individual it serves.

It is not always easy for educational institutions to become either comprehensive in program or community-oriented in relationships. To become such, the institution must identify and capitalize on its unique role. It must construct a program, design an organizational structure, and employ methodology to fulfill that role. It should not be content to be an inadequate copy of that which was designed to answer different needs and serve other functions.

Commitment on the part of any educational institution to the student, the community, and the world of work involves such concepts as that of the campus encompassing the entire service area of the institution; a program of curriculums designed to bring the community and student to the institution and also to take the programs to the community and thus to the student; curriculum not necessarily limited to classroom instruction; a commitment by the institution to serve as a catalyst in community development as well as personal self-improvement; and, a total program that meets all recognized needs but does not duplicate existing services.

Applied specifically to institutions which offer postsecondary curriculums, these goals or characteristics would involve an awareness of needs in all aspects of the community—industry, business, public life, services and professions, and above all, people—and an

attempt to draw upon all the resources of the community to meet those needs. Programs should be for men and women of all ages and levels of preparation. As many aspects of work preparation as possible should be included; for example, work experience, clinical experience, and job environment orientation. The educational institution should take as its responsibility the effective placement of its graduates, and the availability of continuing education and job mobility. Finally, the community itself should provide the source of effective, continuing evaluation techniques, so that not only is the quality of the curriculum measured, but also the subsequent performance of the postsecondary occupational program graduate.

The postsecondary institution should be attuned to the surrounding community so that its program, from the outset, is integrally bound up with the carefully surveyed needs of that community. Priorities for education and training to meet manpower needs should be established, and their relation to what the postsecondary institution might offer should be explored. In this regard, questions such as the following should be raised:

1. What national manpower needs are evident?
2. Is there a relationship between regional or community manpower needs and the national needs?
3. To what extent are local needs now being met by existing programs in other institutions and agencies?
4. Are some manpower shortages so acute that definite priorities for program developments can be identified?
5. Will the needs identified persist to the extent that a long-term program can be planned?
6. If the career program is to be developed, what should its appropriate length be, what type of student will it enroll, what purpose will it serve—initial job entry, re-orientation to job performance, continuing education, or some combination of these?

A partnership of cooperation: Each postsecondary institution has the responsibility to cooperate with the total system of career education within a community; that is, curriculums, facilities, and personnel should be

articulated among local schools, manpower training agencies, employment services, rehabilitation programs, business and industry, and the community itself. Through planned articulation—both vertical and horizontal—duplication can be avoided, efforts and resources can be combined to produce excellence rather than quantity in programs, and students are enabled to coordinate their experience and training through complementary, rather than conflicting programs. For example, a well-presented postsecondary occupational program will follow up and enlarge upon the skill-oriented programs available on the secondary levels. There should be no retracing of a student's high school course work or experience; he should be able to proceed having full credit for work done on the secondary level.

Cooperation should include exploration of more effective and economical means of operation—for example, the availability of unused income sources, both public and private; estimations of daily usage of facilities and equipment; and, perhaps, the development and utilization of regional or district centers for some expensive equipment in the programs.

Articulation, while extremely important at the state and federal levels, must be implemented at the local level if any part of the total program is to be effective. It is a responsibility of the local institution.

Postsecondary institutions have the unique role of providing the leadership to accomplish the task of articulation and communication. It rests with the administration to take the initiative in seeking out other institutions within a community and working to design a curriculum for the student from kindergarten through adult life. Hesitation on the part of postsecondary institutions to do this will negate their role of leadership and place them in a position of failing to meet the needs of the community they serve.

It is needless to discuss at length the debt education owes to industry and business—and vice versa. Education, industry and business are extensions of society and its needs, and of each individual and his needs. As such, they must operate in a coordinated and cooperative manner to make sound working

arrangements for program development and implementation in any occupational field.

It is important to note that because their needs are often directly related to training adults for specific jobs business and industry in a community tend to have more practical interest in, and more contact with, postsecondary institutions than in high schools. This reality represents both a unique asset and a responsibility for the postsecondary institutions.

The individual attempting to find his place as an employed adult requires, and has a right to expect, enlightened effort on the part of the educational institution and acceptance on the part of the employer—and the wisely coordinated guidance of both. For instance, the student can profit more fully from his occupational preparation by avoiding the danger of overspecialization and the trap of too-narrow curriculums; but this will be achieved only if successful working dialogue is being maintained between his educational institution and industry.

Some specifics for coordination and cooperation between educators and employers may be suggested here—surveys of the needs for personnel on all levels; the establishment of sound forecasts and employability of program graduates; information dissemination to the community concerning education programs and job opportunities; preservice experiences; off-campus facilities; cooperative work experience plans; and, clinical facility planning.

Postsecondary occupational education personnel: The characteristics which distinguish the postsecondary student and the program that serves him from other individuals and other programs require that the personnel in the postsecondary occupational education also be unique in some ways.

For example, the counseling program must include a *community counselor* who can understand the community and its needs, discuss these needs with members of the community, and then relate the needs to the potential of the institution for serving them. Because of the postsecondary institution's preeminent commitment to the community as a whole, the community counselor cannot function in the manner of a traditional guid-

ance counselor. He must be involved with people in their own setting, visit with them where they are, talk with them and relate to their problems. It is well-known, and has already been stated here, that the people who most need the community college do not tend to come unbidden to its front door. They must be sought out, and it is part of the role of the community counselor to do this.

Employment counselors also play a vital role in the postsecondary institution. They are in a position to advise the student during pre-employment training and to continue this relationship through placement and during the employment of the graduate.

Instructors in the postsecondary program bear a particularly heavy responsibility regarding proficiency in their subject matter. Certification and other academic qualifications of the instructor must be matched by his ability to perform in business or industry what he is teaching in the classroom. Constant retraining of the instructor is thus necessary—ideally, by means of periodic "recycling" through the normal channels of industry. Here, as in other facets of the program, the importance of business-industry-education cooperation is evident.

Service to the population segments most in need: Occupational education opportunities should be offered, without restriction, to all people who have the desire to prepare themselves for the world of work. Such opportunities could open up new lives for some population segments of the community served by the educational institution—the ethnic minorities, the culturally and economically disadvantaged, those to whom education has been traditionally denied, and those for whom earlier education has meant a struggle. If the community college or the postsecondary vocational school is truly committed to comprehensiveness of program and dedicated to serving its community, then curriculum development will include strong programs capable of bringing those who require additional help to a satisfactory level of achievement so that they can benefit from vocational training.

Traditional efforts to develop remedial programs generally have proved ineffective. New, dynamic and imaginative programs that

can sustain motivation and lead to well-defined goals and visible career choices for the student must be devised. The development of realistic new learning environments, the abolition of punitive grading, the breaking of the "lock-step" mode of instruction and learning, emphasis upon independent instruction at the student's pace, and the construction of modular curriculums are examples of means that may serve all students well and make learning an exciting activity.

Practical and economic considerations: Institutions will continue to face formidable challenges to their development and expansion of educational opportunity. Administrative foresight, sound judgment, and ingenuity will need to be brought to bear on many economically delimiting factors, as the communities to be served continue to mushroom in geographical size, in population, and in number and variety of needs. Before proceeding very far with program development and implementation, the institution administration should consider certain practical questions that must be dealt with in almost any educational enterprise and try to find solutions in relation to the particular career areas under study.

1. Are the work facilities in the area adequate enough to insure the satisfactory planning for work experience, cooperative programs, on-the-job training, and clinical experience?
2. Does the institution have sufficient financial resources to support the program on a quality basis?
3. Can a qualified program director and staff be obtained?
4. Are the physical facilities for housing the program acceptable and satisfactory?
5. Will students be attracted to the program in sufficient numbers to insure its stability?
6. Is the cost of the program to the student, to the community, and to the institution within acceptable and reasonable limits?
7. As new students come into the program, is the institution able to meet increased demands on its student personnel and counseling services, its library resources, its food services, and its parking facilities?

Evaluation and service to the whole individual: The primary justification for educa-

tion's existence and function is the need of the individual to be served. Correspondingly, the extent to which this need is met should be one of the prime criteria by which the success of any educational program is judged. Such a concept is particularly apt for occupational education, which must assure the individual of sufficient opportunity to prepare and qualify for jobs and wages consistent with his aspirations, interests, and capabilities.

Student mobility and program flexibility are key concepts in the planning and development of curriculums, if the student is to realize his full potential, the satisfaction of his total interests, career growth, and maturity. He should be able to move from rather easily developed skills and competencies to more complex and sophisticated career demands and expectations without artificial educational barriers erected to impede his progress. The ladder-and-lattice concept of progression is an accepted dictum, and its promotion as an educational concept is to the advantage of the individual student and of society at large. Curriculum development, and coordination among institutions, should facilitate this kind of movement and opportunity, so that "dead-end" careers will rapidly become a part of the past.

The skill and ability function of the curriculum should not be zealously emphasized to the point that other important elements of curriculum construction are neglected. The social and self-satisfaction factors must be considered. In fact, education's greatest contribution to the career field may be said to be its ability to prepare not merely workers but *people*—identifiable, recognizable people who can become well-rounded individuals, participating productively in their society and reaping returns of dignity and satisfaction.

Much emphasis has been placed upon evaluating the program, the setting, and the ancillary services of the institution. But what matters above all else is the student who comes from the program and enters the world of work. Is he prepared to perform in the manner that will be expected of him? Has he, and others like him in the community, received the training and education needed to pursue a meaningful career satisfactorily and effectively? If so, the program has been func-

tioning effectively, whatever its shortcomings. If not, it has failed, even if its organization, equipment and implementation appear to be superb. The program does indeed continue to need evaluation in all its facets, but it is the graduating student, and his or her ability to live fully and productively, that will be the ultimate test of a program's effectiveness. This is the purpose and the point of all occupational education.

Summary of concepts to be accepted for effective implementation: There are a number of such concepts, but they may be summed up succinctly as follows:

1. Programs must have mobility and flexibility of opportunity rather than be structured in the classic rigidity of program form.

2. Planning for meeting the career needs of the community—whatever the community may be—through the development of occupational education programs must be a cooperative and coordinative effort of all educational institutions in the community, on all levels of preparation. The advantages to one or another single institution should be subordinated, in the ideal, to the overall benefit to the individual served.

3. Satisfactory and productive employability of the individual should be the emphasized end result of education.

4. Learning procedures and methods within a program should have a flexibility that would allow them to be tailored to the particular needs and characteristics of the individual, so that he can learn in ways that are the most efficient and satisfactory for him and progress at a rate of speed suitable for him.

5. True relationships of the vocational education role must be established with the postsecondary occupational education role and the honest permeations of both roles must be understood and implemented in a way that would be of the greatest benefit to the people served.

IV
New Attitudes and Approaches to Postsecondary Occupational Education

It seems a paradox that a nation that for so long adopted the Puritan mystique glorifying work and the working man suddenly finds itself lending poor acceptance and support to vocational-technical-occupational education programs. Part of the dilemma we face today has arisen from the poorly conceived, and at times negative, attitudes of professional educators towards such programs. Even now, with the tremendous technological advances made in the last 50 years, more encouragement, support, and attention is given to the management-oriented worker than to the performance-oriented worker who sustains and maintains the technology.

With the realization on the part of every occupational program educator that we are engaged in a new world of people, a new world of work, and a new world of life qualities, a much more positive, aggressive, and dynamic attitude and approach to career education must be taken.

First, coordinated planning for career education, involving all institutions and agencies of the area to be served, is extremely important. No longer can each institution or agency go its own way, doing its own planning. Education at its best is a total, encompassing, continuing process—a whole of which any one institution or agency is only a part. The old "keep-off-the-grass" philosophy and "empire-building" concepts have no place in the fast-moving events we are now witnessing and will continue to witness for decades to come. Only through working together for a total concept of career education, from the elementary school to the university, will educators truly meet the challenges of today's world.

Second, the postsecondary occupational institution must recognize and actively assume its own responsibility for leadership in community-wide efforts to offer better educational opportunities to people. The institution should capitalize on its direct and practical value to local business and industry, and develop to the fullest its unique capacities for reaching people with needs and for link-

ing them with the available resources. If the postsecondary institution fails to take advantage of its own special position and assets, education as a whole will suffer a loss for which no other segment of the community will be able to compensate.

Third, career educators must give positive support to the development of student-oriented occupational programs. Lip service, placebos, and agreeable philosophical expounding upon student recognition and involvement in programs are no longer durable or tolerable. Strong, well-conceived approaches to admission revision, curriculum relevancy, and student recognition must be realized. Students should be encouraged to start where they are and proceed with the opportunity to go as far as their potential and objectives will take them. Changes will be needed for measuring student progress; new schedules must be developed that are more appropriate to effective learning experience. Positive, direct action is required if the needs of people are to be met.

Fourth, a positive action on the part of career educators must be taken in restructuring the whole approach to curriculum. Such restructuring should lead toward:

1. Avoiding increased specialization that leads to "dead-end" opportunities and too-narrow career preparation that frustrates mobility both in educational programs and job opportunities
2. Providing for greater student mobility and program flexibility
3. Providing for new learning plans, methods, and procedures—new courses, materials, teaching techniques, and experiences
4. Providing for a new independence on the part of the student in his learning, helping him to develop his own learning experiences
5. Providing for new times and places for learning
6. Providing for more actual experience in the job setting
7. Developing enough curriculum flexibility so that there will be no "failures."

Fifth, a more positive attitude and position must be developed concerning legislative support and funding of career programs. Occupational education on the postsecondary

level has not spoken in either a strong or unified voice for support of programs and institutions. Representation and support for career education and opportunity, not for only a part of the whole, should be clearly evident.

Finally, a strong stand should be taken by all postsecondary career program educators against the demeaning attitudes of some that occupational education is for the lower-achievement groups, that it is not "real education", that it is the "dumping ground" for those who do not "fit" into collegiate programs, that it consists of "watered-down" curriculums, that leadership is not developed through such programs. The obligations of education to the society it serves must be more strongly defined and identified, and the position, role and function of occupational education clearly delineated.

Conclusion

Postsecondary occupational education was created because of the developing needs of a technological society. It now nourishes and sustains that society and provides for continuing technological advancement and modification in the decades ahead. Without the number and quality of personnel now coming from postsecondary programs, technology itself would falter and fail. All of society has a responsibility and an obligation to this education, its continuing advance and thrust, its continuing service.

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